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Interviewer: My name is Alicia Mittelman; I'm a curator at the Estes Park Museum. Today is February 27, 2014 and we are in the training garage at Josh Wharton's home and we will interview him today for the Estes Valley Oral History Mountaineering Project which is a joint venture between the Estes Valley Library and the Estes Park Museum. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with assistance from Alicia Mittelman.

What is your full name?

Josh Wharton: Joshua McKee Wharton

Interviewer: Josh, you grew up in New Hampshire, right?

Josh Wharton: Yep, Southern New Hampshire a little town called Nottingham.

Interviewer: When did you first come to Estes Park?

Josh Wharton: I bet the first time I came here was when I was maybe seven or eight, like on a family summer road trip. We were going backpacking and hiking in places and I think that was the first time I came to Estes. I think I hiked to Emerald Lake.

Interviewer: Your father, John Wharton had been to Estes Park in the 1950s?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, my dad came in I think '59, summer of '59. He went to school back east and some friends of his went on a summer climbing road trip and drove out and went climbing here. They went and climbed Ship Rock in New Mexico and they went to the Tetons and Devil's Tower and did like a little summer circuit.

Interviewer: Do you know how he got involved in climbing?

Josh Wharton: Yes, he grew up in Liverpool, England and my Grandfather and my Grandmother were both climbers, like hikers and climbers. They would go to the Lake District every summer. My dad's godfather's name was Scotty Guire and he owned a guide service in the Lakes District and so my dad used to spend his summers climbing with his godfather and then also once he got old enough, guiding for him. So that's how he got into climbing and through his parents.

Interviewer: So they were hooked up to a rope, they were doing some technical climbing?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, I've actually got some photos of my grandfather doing some stuff that looks like properly hard with just a rope tied around his waist and like proper British formal wear.

Interviewer: So it's in your blood. Then was it your dad that took you on your first climbs.

Josh Wharton: Yeah, I went climbing occasionally, like every couple of years with my dad and his old climbing partner also had kids but I didn't really actually like it. I would cry and stuff and I thought climbing was awful. I was really scared of heights and I was kind of a wimpy kid. I did climb with my dad growing up and we went to the Lake District once for like a summer trip when I was maybe ten or twelve and did some other climbing around New Hampshire, but I didn't really start doing it on my own until I was a teenager in high school with friends of mine.

Interviewer: What was more appealing about it later on when you were a teenager?

Josh Wharton: Well I think climbing kind of gives you a lot of independence and freedom and so when I was doing it with my dad, it didn't seem as cool but when I started doing it with my friends it seemed cool. Like it was an adventure for us to go out on our own and sneak away from school and go climbing and things like that.

Interviewer: You came out to Estes Park again as a teenager on a road trip?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, so by the time I was maybe 16 or 17 I was starting to really fall in love with climbing and after my junior year in high school a friend and I loaded up our van and drove out here and went climbing, kind of like my dad had. We went to here and Boulder and Tetons and to Wyoming and did a big circuit for the summer.

Interviewer: Do you remember specifically what you climbed in Estes?

Josh Wharton: I think that summer we climbed a couple of days at Lumpy Ridge on the Book. I think the first route we did was Osiris which I remember felt horrible and hard because it's so flaring and we'd never climbed anything like that. So I think we climbed at the Book a couple of days and then I think we went and did the Petit.

Interviewer: Wow, so you did a day at Lumpy and then a day in the alpine. Then after you graduated high school you came to Boulder, right?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, I came to C.U. in '97, I started school here.

Interviewer: Did you make very many trips up to Rocky Mountain National Park?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, for sure. As soon as I moved to, I kind of came to C.U. because I was into bike racing at the time, that's what I'd done through high school and I thought I'd be on the bike racing team. I did that for a month and then realized then realized that I liked climbing way more and that it was way more fun, so I quit bike racing and my dad wasn't that psyched about that. And then I just started climbing like all the time, that was basically what I lived for. So I would make trips all over the place up here, up to Utah but yeah, I started climbing here a lot.

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Interviewer: What were some of your objectives back then?

Josh Wharton: Well after my freshman year in college, we climbed the Diamond that next summer.

Interviewer: What route?

Josh Wharton: I think that summer I did the Casual Route and we did Pervertical and then we did Yellow Wall and I was super motivated so I wanted to climb up there a lot. I was sort of breaking into 5.10 and 5.11 and that kind of really opened up the place to a bunch of different climbs. Yeah, I'm sure I would come up to the Park that summer after my freshman year in college maybe at least once a week to go climbing. I did stuff like my dad's old routes like Sickle and Birds of Fire on Chief's Head and all the classics.

Interviewer: Can we talk about Sykes Sickle a little bit? [Josh Wharton: Sure] That's a really interesting route it's, I think, a 5.9+ up on Spearhead. Why don't you describe it to me?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, so it's a route that my dad remembered really fondly, he really loves that one; he had fond memories of it. Spearhead's kind of a classic pyramid formation with a little summit on it and the route Sykes Sickle goes straight up the main pyramid and has a bunch of nice 5.7 climbing on the lower part and then kind of an intimidating roof slot near the top that I think my dad aid-climbed at the time. In fact I do remember that he told me a story about that they went up, they tried it and they didn't have enough pitons so they went back to Boulder, got more pitons and then went back and finished the route. Then I think a few years later Royal Robins did the first free ascent of the climb. He did it with a guy named Dick Sykes who I think taught math at C.U. and was a friend of them somehow. He might have been a climbing ranger or something in the summer at the time here. That's how they found out about that route. That's all I know about it really.

Interviewer: Did your father also climb with Dave Rearick?

Josh Wharton: Yes, yes that name sounds totally familiar; I think my dad did do some climbing with him.

Interviewer: Were you thinking about your dad when you climbed up there? Did you think about how different it would be with the gear that he had and what you had in comparison?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, I'm sure I did at the time. I used to talk to my dad about climbing all the time once I got into climbing and when I was in college, it's funny he would call up, most parents would be like, "How's school going, yada, yada." My dad would be like, "What did you climb this week?" I'm sure I talked to my dad about the route at the time. I remember him telling me that there's a bolt on the final 5.7 slab traverse, I remember him telling me that he was really upset that, I don't know which of his partners put that bolt in, but he thought it was totally unnecessary. So even like 40 years later he was complaining about this bolt being in there. [chuckles]

Interviewer: He didn't encourage you to chop it did he?

Josh Wharton: No, no he didn't. But I thought that was pretty funny.

Interviewer: Wow, that's such a cool connection. When you were in college did you start kind of identifying yourself as an alpinist or a?

Josh Wharton: No, for me back then climbing didn't have like these "I'm a sport climber, I'm a boulderer, I'm a trad climber" deal to it. It was kind of like you did a little bit of everything. Although I'd say I definitely didn't do as much sport climbing as I did other types of climbing. I just think that climbing traditionally going back had been, you did a little bit of everything. It was all sort of in preparation for doing big routes in the mountains for doing alpine stuff. That's kind of like how my dad had approached it and had taught me and that's sort of how I looked at it too. So I didn't think of it as like, "I'm a rock climber or I'm an alpinist." It was just sort of all climbing to me and I was excited about doing all of it.

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Interviewer: With those same kind of ethics in mind, were you also raised kind of in the tradition that you never hang on gear, if you can't do the move you down climb to figure it out?

Josh Wharton: Yeah to some degree. I think that actually in a lot of ways that held my climbs back because when I learned from my dad, he told me that he only fell twice in 20 years of climbing, climbing a lot. So if you fell off you were probably trying something that was too hard for you, so we did a lot of easy routes. A lot, a lot of easy climbs going up like top roping, doing tons of 5.5s and 5.6s and things like that, so I had a really slow progression. But when I moved to Boulder, Boulder is such a hub of climbing and has the highest standards in climbing it's say in the States for the last 30-40 years, like that's where climbing's being pushed the most. So it's hard not to like see people out at the cliff who are really good and learn from them and see what they are doing. Soon as I moved to Boulder I'd say my approach became less traditional in that way.

Interviewer: I think I heard you explain once that you've observed in the United States there are fewer all around climbers. Kind of because of the geography. Can you explain that to me?

Josh Wharton: Yea, so there's not really many places where you can live in the States where you have access to all the different types of climbing. The Front Range is an exception. If you live in the east coast there aren't really truly big mountains, there aren't really very big cliffs so you don't have access to big walls or to alpine climbing. But if you live in Estes Park you could go alpine climbing one day and then you could go down to Boulder and go bouldering the next day and then the next day after that you could drive to Ouray and go ice climbing. So you have access to all sorts of different types of climbing and that's just not true in most places in the States. Whereas, versus Europe where there are a lot more all-around climbers, they have really quick access. If you live in a place like Interlaken, Switzerland you could go and climb the Eiger one day and then go sport climbing the next and then go bouldering at the Ticino the next. So you have access things really quickly and easily.

Interviewer: After Boulder you lived in Rifle, Colorado for a while?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, after graduating, my wife and I, well she wasn't my wife at the time, my girlfriend and I moved to the Western Slope because she got a job running like an art studio with a dance program there. So we lived in Glenwood [Springs] for a year and then we bought a house in Rifle and lived in Rifle for four years which was painful. [laughter]

Interviewer: A few years ago, around 2010 was it? [Josh Wharton: Yeah] You and your wife Erinn moved to Estes Park. So what motivated you to move here?

Josh Wharton: Erinn and I knew we wanted to get out of Rifle so we were kind of like looking at different places. We thought about moving to Europe and Erinn actually got a job in Germany so we were potentially going to go to Germany but we were looking at going maybe to the east side of California, somewhere around Bishop or up to Truckee, or coming to somewhere back in the Front Range. Because we knew those were the best places for, that we'd both be happy and that I could still climb full time. But when she got that job in Estes Park we kind of like, "Well, that's an opportunity we shouldn't miss because if we go to Europe we are just going to be there for a couple of years and we're kind of treading water but Estes is a place we know we'd want to live for a long long time." So that's how we wound up here.

Interviewer: You have a lot of climbing partners here.

Josh Wharton: Yeah, I love living in Estes because the real neat thing is I have partners of every genre. I have people I boulder with, I have people I go rock climbing with, people I go alpine climbing with, which is really cool and I didn't have that all in Rifle and it really helps to have motivated fun people to climb with, so it's been great, I've tons of people to climb with here.

Interviewer: Now that you have been living in Estes Park since 2010, you've done a lot in the short time that you've been here in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Josh Wharton: Helps not to have a real job. [chuckles]

Interviewer: Tell me about linkups and how this has kind of become a new part of the game.

Josh Wharton: I don't know if it's that new. Like linkups have been around for a while. I'd say they're probably most inspired by in the early '90s, Peter Croft and John Bachar doing Half Dome and the Nose that day. I'd say that's like kind of when people really like took note of that and wanted to link more features. It's just a good way, if you've climbed a lot here and done most of the larger stuff, to make bigger objectives for yourself. To make a bigger challenge, so that's kind of how linkups come about. I've done a bunch of linkups in the desert and in the Black Canyon [of the Gunnison] and in Rocky Mountain National Park as well.

Interviewer: Tell me about the big one you did in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Josh Wharton: Which one are you talking about?

Interviewer: The Diamond and

Josh Wharton: Like going off into Spearhead and stuff recently? [Interviewer: Yeah.] A couple of years ago my friend John Dickey and I did a linkup where we climbed Ariana on the Diamond and then we did Stone Monkey on Spearhead and then we did Ithaca on Arrowhead. So kind of like the three classic 12As in the Park in a day. It makes really good sense because it's kind of a perfect horseshoe shape so you're not walking out of the way for any of it. I hadn't done Stone Monkey or Ithaca beforehand so it was kind of a cool. They are both routes that I wanted to climb but they are also kind of a long walk for not that much climbing. So it was kind of a nice way to go climb those routes but make it a bigger day. So yeah, it was really cool, it was a fun adventure.

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Interviewer: Wow, did it go smoothly?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, it went easily enough, yeah it was totally fine. We parked our car, I think we started at 4:00 in the morning and my wife Erinn moved a car for us from the Longs Peak Trailhead over to the trailhead by Glacier Gorge so that when we walked out we would have a car there. I think it took us 19 hours car to car or something like that.

Interviewer: Another first ascent that you had done was the Two Dragons on the south side of Hallett's Peak. Can you tell me about that climb?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, Two Dragons is actually on the east face of the Dragon Tail Spire, right above the Dragon Tail couloir. There is a summer rock climb there, summer rock climb called Dragon Slayer, an obscure 5.11+. My friend Steve Su and I, has done a lot of winter climbing in the Park, climbed that route in winter. I noticed a series of roofs going out to the right after the first pitch. It kind of had like a scrappy look of mixed climbing, there's like some big hummocks in it to swing into and some grass on it. It didn't really have any ice on it, but it looked kind of a good Scottish style objective so a couple of weeks later I went back and tried that as well. Turned out to be a really cool good route.

Interviewer: What's a Scottish style objective?

Josh Wharton: Scotland has a really long tradition of winter climbing but it's kind of an odd thing because there's so much moisture in the air there, like snow plasters to the cliff in the winter and they get really thin ice and snow plastered to the cliff. So there's not really like ice in the way that we think of ice climbing, like big drips of ice formed by waterfalls. But there's bits of ice around and there's a long tradition of doing summer rock routes in the winter there and that's like the way people train for big alpine routes. And it turns out that's really excellent training because usually the hardest climbing you do in the mountains is snow covered rock, it's not actually the ice climbing. There's been a tradition of people doing that in

Rocky Mountain National Park for many many years and I've just sort of fallen into that tradition and started to do some of it in the winter here but it's obviously not as popular as it is in Scotland.

Interviewer: On that day that you did Two Dragons you had somebody filming it, is that right? [Josh Wharton: Yeah.] What's that like, trying to focus on something that's never been done before and yet there's a camera in your face?

Josh Wharton: For me it doesn't really change it that much because if you're trying something that's actually hard for you, you have to be pretty focused on it. A lot of people, you'll often hear people say that they think that it takes the commitment away and stuff in the climb world if there's a cameraman there. I actually don't think that that's true. There is definitely like a safety element, for instance if I was in a really bad spot or something or climbed through a hard section then suddenly discovered there's no gear, I could be like, "John, throw me the rope." The guy who's filming. So there's definitely,

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it does take some commitment away but at the same time, I think often if you are trying something that's hard for you, you're just in the moment and you are focused on what you are doing. So the cameraman doesn't have anything to do with that. It's not like you're about to grab his foot or anything. [chuckles] To me it doesn't really change it very much, sometimes it makes it more fun because you get to go back and look at the climbs you did and see what they're about. I've worked a lot with John Dickey in Rocky Mountain National Park and it's a nice thing to do because he is here in Boulder and it's not very difficult for us to shoot together. He knows what he's doing, he's a real deal climber and so it's easy for us to and it's good for me with Patagonia through work to get some footage and photos. So it kind of balances out, it's a great thing.

Interviewer: How does that come to be, is it your sponsors like Patagonia or Scarpa asking you to meet a quota of how many climbs are filmed or you have a friend like John Dickey who says, "I'd really like to capture some climbing this winter?"

Josh Wharton: It can be anything but it's not nearly as formal as you would think. Usually what it is, is Jane Sievert who runs a Photo Department at Patagonia is looking for photos or video of a new jacket that's going to come out. She needs like photo assets of this jacket or she needs video assets. So she'll send an e-mail out to several of the [Patagonia] Ambassadors that says, "Hey, I'm looking for photo assets, if you get out with this jacket or if you have any photos, please send them to me." I'll think, "Ok, I'm going to go try this new route in a couple of days or I'm going to try this climb." I'll call up John and say, "I just got an e-mail from Jane, she wants to shoot this piece, let's just go film this route. I'm going to go climbing anyway so why not come along and shoot it?" Two birds with one stone

kind of thing. So it's nice and it's often like that. But sometimes it'll be really a route that we think is really cool or John really wants to shoot, and he'll say, "Hey, let's go shoot this." Then may or may not sell the videos with the photos later.

Interviewer: I see. What's it like being a sponsored climber?

Josh Wharton: It's been really good actually. It's a bizarre thing in the sense that a lot of people think that you play and don't really work hard for a living. That's true in some levels because it's something that doesn't ever feels like work because it's stuff that I would do anyway, but at the same time I do work really hard in a way that some people might not get like the training and getting up early to go do routes. So it can be a lot of work at the same time. But I feel really lucky because I don't think there are that many people that manage to scrape out a living as a full time climber, so I feel really lucky to have been able to do that. I hope that I can continue to do it. I think being with Patagonia is especially lucky because they really involve us with the design process of things that are coming out and in the pipeline and in getting photo assets for catalogues and writing and things like that. It helps you feel more involved and it's not just going out and being a cool guy and climbing.

Interviewer: It sounds to me like being a professional climber involves this whole puzzle of sponsorships and grant writing and being your own coach. It's a complicated thing it seems to me. When you go after some grants how do you express in your writing the importance of a climb you want to go do?

Josh Wharton: It's not that complicated because the grant committee, the people who are looking at the applications are really well traveled climbers who have done lots of amazing climbs. So they have a really good sense for what objectives and what climbs are interesting. So you don't have to really sell the objective too much, it's really a question of what have you done as a climber and how exciting and inspiring is this objective. And then does those two fit together and so should they give you some money to try to support it?

04:34

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of a climb that you did where you applied for a grant and then planned an expedition?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, I've gotten a lot of grants actually, I've been really fortunate to get a lot of grants. As a young climber I think they made a really big difference for me. Like when I was doing my first trips to Asia, Pakistan, and didn't have very much money and really kind of needed the money to make the trip happen. For those trips, one of the first trips I did was to the rock spire called "The Flame" in Pakistan in the Trango Valley. That was in 2002. We had a Lyman Spitzer Grant as well as some mountaineering fellowship grants for that trip. They basically covered like half the cost so it made what would be a \$6,000 trip per person a \$3,000 trip per person and made it like reasonable for us to pull it off. At that

time, since I wasn't as an experienced a climber, it was kind of harder to get those grants because I didn't have as much of a climbing resume. But I was really passionate about what we were going to do and I think that was reflected in the grant application. Yeah, it's just a process of writing what you are going to do and laying it out and hopefully you will get some support. The American Alpine Club is amazing that way, so it's a really good resource for young climbers.

Interviewer: Let's talk a little bit about your training here. What kind of training do you do in Rocky Mountain National Park or Estes Park to prepare for places like Patagonia where you just recently were or Pakistan?

Josh Wharton: So there's just going climbing and then there's training, they are like two different things I think. If I'm going someplace that's like got a lot of winter climbing then I try to do some climbing in the winter in the Park, so it's sort of specific to that kind of climbing. I think of that as skill training. So basically when you are climbing you are skill training but then there's physical training too and that might be going out on your skis and doing like a hard lap at Hidden Valley or depending upon what your objective is, it might be bouldering in here, or climbing on the Treadwall or going for runs. So it kind of depends what your goal is, it's like you're training specific to that.

Interviewer: There's a really great film out there of you climbing up Englishman's Route [route named after Josh's father, John Wharton] in the wintertime and in it you say, "This is a good climb to do when you are tired." [laughter] What's going on in your mind when you do that?

Josh Wharton: Well most of the time when you are climbing a route like the Englishman's Route you are staying on your feet, so you're not getting pumped, it's not that physical. When you do go to a big range like the Himalaya, you ordinarily are doing climbs that take a few days and so you're going to be climbing tired. I often will do the specific training which might be climbing on the Treadwall or running or going to Hidden Valley the day before I go and do a climb like the Englishman's Route. So I will be somewhat tired when I'm going there. I find that when I'm tired I tend to climb better than when I'm fresh because I'm focused on climbing well rather than trying to muscle my way through the climbing.

Interviewer: In addition to the Englishman's Route, what are some others that are good for that type of training?

Josh Wharton: Hallett's [Hallett Peak] is perfect for winter climbing cause it's like a relatively short approach and it tends to get plastered with snow, so the Slit is one of my favorite climbs on Hallett's. I've done the Love Route in winter and Jackson-Johnson in winter and Hallett's Chimney obviously is a good one. So Hallett's is great, but there's all sorts of cliffs all over Rocky Mountain National Park with that style of climbing. Basically all you need is to be like somewhat nasty weather and that's it. So you can go climb anywhere, I just try to steer clear of super classic rock climbs, cause if you're climbing with crampons and ice tools you don't want to be messing up the rock. So I wouldn't go climb something like

Skye's Sickle or D-7 on the Diamond. I steer clear of the routes that have maybe fragile features, but luckily there are so few mixed climbers it doesn't really matter, there's not that big of an impact.

09:40

Interviewer: Speaking of mixed climbers, we spoke to Kelly Cordes recently and he talked about days where he's out in the Park doing some mixed climbing and you can see over to Lumpy Ridge and it's sunny and warm and you guys are just getting beaten up with bad weather inside the Park. Have you had experiences like that?

Josh Wharton: Oh, yeah, I think the Park in winter is actually one of the gnarliest places you can climb. I think it's nastier in the Park than it is in Patagonia in the winter in general. It's super windy, it's often snowing there even if it's not really actually snowing just from blowing snow. It's really really cold or it can be, so I think climbing in the Park in winter is a pretty full on, as a real deal as it gets for sure.

Interviewer: You have a reputation for going light and just kind of suffering through some of the bad weather and things of that nature. What's the dialogue in your mind to get through that?

Josh Wharton: I think it's just a question of like wanting to do the climb. I mean there's nothing really complicated about it, it's just a question of how bad do you want it. If you want it really badly then you're willing to put up with quite a lot. And if you don't want it very much then you might turn around before you even get there. So there's nothing all that special about it, it's just a question of. I try to keep in mind, like especially if I fly across the world to go climbing, I try to keep in mind that, "Hey, there was a lot of like effort and time that was put into this route so let's give it our all. It's not that easy to just come back tomorrow." Whereas around here I might not try quite so hard because it might be like, "Well, I can just come back next week or whatever it might be."

Interviewer: You had a pretty bad injury in Rifle when you fell and hurt your back and it took a lot to heal from it. Did you ever think about doing something besides climbing after something as traumatic as that happened?

Josh Wharton: Not really actually, I wish I could say that I did, but actually as soon as I got hurt all I wanted to do is go climbing again. A lot of people said that to me, like "Awe, you should write a guidebook or work on a book or look for some other avenues." I was just like, yeah! I need to get healthy and get fit again. So that was kind of my focus through, which was a scary time too because I didn't know how I would recover from that. So I didn't know how that would work out but it did, luckily.

Interviewer: Tell me about the Dunn-Westbay Route that you did.

Josh Wharton: So the Dunn-Westbay is an aid climb on the right side of the Diamond, first done by Jimmy Dunn and Billy Westbay, I think in the early 70s sometime. Most of the rock on the right side of the Diamond is not very good, it's kind of a little bit chossy but this route actually has really good rock. Starting, I'm not sure maybe

ten years ago now, Andy Dodson and Pete Tekeda started working on free climbing it and they added bolts to make a variation off of one section that was particularly thin, off the aid climb, but never were able to free climb this one cross pitch on the route. So when I moved to Estes I kind of knew about that, I knew that hadn't really been actively working on it for a while. So I called Pete to make sure it was ok if I went and climbed the new route. Then started working on it that summer which involved taking 200 meters of static rope to the top of the Diamond and then throwing the rope off the top and then I'd mini traxion, so top rope solo on the climb to see if all the moves went, see if I could free climb it. Then once I'd spent a couple of days doing that and knew that I could free climb the route, then I went and led it from Broadway and did the first free ascent.

Interviewer: Wow, who was your climbing partner that day?

Josh Wharton: My friend Kevin Cochran, a college buddy just jumared behind me. On a difficult free climb like that it often really helps to have someone jumare for you because then they can carry extra water and food and you don't have to pull the rope up belaying and it's sort of a selfish endeavor in the sense that it's all about you and trying to do the climb. But it's nice to have your friend support you and hopefully you reciprocate at some time and go jumare support them on some climb.

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Interviewer: Was the route kind of wet?

Josh Wharton: Yeah, the top of the route is, the reason why the rock is so good is because the route gets brushed by water which cleans it, has cleaned it over time. That side of the Diamond is notoriously wet, some summers if you're lucky it will be dry, but when I actually climbed the Dunn-Westbay the last two 5.12 pitches were like dripping with water which was really miserable and cold, but luckily managed to do it. I think if you would catch it dry it would be like one of the nicer routes on the Diamond but it's pretty rarely dry. Then just the past summer Tommy Caldwell did like the direct version, the actual original aid-line. So the version I'd done like diverged from the aid-line for maybe 100' and he did the direct version which is the first 5.14 on the Diamond. The other version was the second 5.13 on the Diamond and now there's a 5.14 on the Diamond too which is pretty cool to have that kind of high level climbing at altitude.

Interviewer: Tommy's a friend of yours. Does it feel sort of competitive or what is the nature of it?

Josh Wharton: Not really because, one, Tommy's a much better rock climber than I am, like much better so there's really no competition at all. But if anything it just feels really nice to have another full time climber in town to climb with and get out with and train with that has like similar experiences to me. So I feel really lucky to have Tommy as a friend and as a climbing partner here in town. It's really a nice thing.

Interviewer: How do you train together?

Josh Wharton: He comes here to the garage all the time to train on the Treadwall or to go bouldering. He just was recently in Patagonia and he hasn't done much ice or mixed climbing so we went up to the Park for a day and climbed the Rock Route, the summer 5.11 in crampons and ice tools so that he could get some experience doing that and get tuned in for his Patagonia trip. So just like that we'll help each other out. He's loaned me rope before, like bunches of static rope to go mini traxioning in the Diamond and I loaned him ice tools and things that he might need for a project or give him advice about different alpine climbing things what he might bring. So just like feeding ideas back and forth off each other. Then the physical stuff like going to Hidden Valley and like racing each other up and like trying to do boulder problems together, and work on it together, things like that.

Interviewer: I can imagine that comradery is really important for you because even though climbing is growing in popularity, it's still relatively small and you guys are kind of breaking ground with what's possible in climbing and making it a profession. So without really any model, any generations before you doing this.

Josh Wharton: Yeah, I think a lot of climbing at the upper end is about being creative in coming up with new ideas and new things to do. It's not necessarily about the physicality of it. That's changing a little bit in things like bouldering and sport climbing which are the more popular types of climbing. There are so many people who are so talented at that now with climbing gyms. So that level's really skyrocketing. But when it comes to alpinism and strange forms of climbing like doing hard stuff on the Diamond, there's not that many people involved so it does help to have somebody else who's doing that kind of stuff and you can bounce ideas off and say, "Awe that's a cool idea," or "Awe that doesn't sound so great." Who really knows what they're talking about? For like your average person like it's hard to understand what is something that's really cool and what's not so cool. Climbing's really subtle that way and so it doesn't really have, it's not obvious what might be super hard or what might not be very hard.

Interviewer: Did you ever have an idea of something to do and then a friend kind of talked you out of it just because of the subtlety thing?

Josh Wharton: I'm sure I've had like a bazillion ideas that weren't that cool and then a bazillion that were that cool so I'm trying to think of something specific recently that wasn't that great of an idea. Trying to do,

19:35 [End of Part B.]

[C].

00:00

Tommy has this idea of trying to do like a V14 a 5.14 on the Diamond in a day, so it's like three 14s and I think that's kind of a cool idea but I actually don't think it's that great of an idea because if you have all those things wired it's not as cool. Once you know a route and know how to climb it, it's much easier to do it again. So it's kind of like, doing something like that is less creative than doing

something new to me. Than doing something is like really putting yourself out there. That kind of objective is more like a gymnastics routine, like you're rehearsing something until you have it perfect and then boom, you do it. It's not as interesting or out there. I think I've done similar things like trying to do an M11, a V11 and a 5.14 in a day, which I haven't done yet but I'd like to do that. That's kind of like not that creative of an idea I don't think, even though people might think that sounds really awesome, it's sort of like not that fancy to pull that off really.

Interviewer: What other goals do you have for the future?

Josh Wharton: This year I'd like to do the Hallucinogen Wall in a day in the Black Canyon which is a big wall free climb. I've tried that a couple of times but haven't quite pulled it off and I'd like to go to Alaska this spring for a quick trip, like ten days. Some free climbing in the Wind Rivers this summer, two trips there and do some hard boulder problems and some hard rock climbs locally. So that's this year, I've got a new daughter so I don't want to spend too much time away from home this year.

Interviewer: Actually that's something I respect a lot about some of the trips that you've planned. You've been to Pakistan several times and you have friends there, same with Alaska, you return and Black Canyon as well. I like that you kind of have a commitment to these places in that respect. Does being a sponsored climber in any way affect some of the decisions you make when you are in a scary place like the Black Canyon?

Josh Wharton: I don't think so, not for me. There really aren't pressures from sponsors and things to like pull off climbs, you don't get that. Maybe some people do but I've never experienced that. I think the thing about climbing is it's a small sport and there's not a lot of money in it. So if you want to be a full time professional climber you really have to love climbing. You really have to want to do it for yourself. I'm like super driven and motivated to climb regardless of what's going on with sponsors or whatever that might be. I've never had a shortage of coming up with ideas for like goals and projects. Like I've always got a list longer than I'll ever do, so when I'm climbing it's about things that inspire me that I really want to do, that I'm excited about. It's not about what somebody else might want me to do or somebody else in climbing. I think that's the way to have longevity in the sport, like I think at the point where you decide that you're doing this because you think you should or because it's what you're good at and that you should just push that, then that's when you're going to fall out of love with the sport and won't be the same any more.

Interviewer: What other climbers out there inspire you?

Josh Wharton: Tommy inspires me for sure; he's somebody I look up to a bunch. Tons of climbers have inspired me through the years. Steve House has inspired me a lot. In the younger generation right now Hayden Kennedy inspires me. Lots of like older climbers that have been mentors to me have inspired me like Chris

Goplereud is an older climber. Somebody who climbed for 30 or 40 years and like still really loves it and is really excited to go out all the time, cause that's where I want to be when I'm 50 or 60 or 70, hopefully still climbing, still excited and still have projects and things I want to do. So some of those guys like that really inspire me. There's a British climber named Paul Ramsdon that really inspires me.

05:01

Interviewer: How come, what is he doing?

Josh Wharton: He does all sorts of adventurous alpine trips which I find really cool, with another guy named Mick Fowler. Those two guys they both have like normal jobs and families but they go on these crazy adventure climbs all over the place and that's really cool. Then I think that right now on a personal day to day level, the climber that inspires me the most is a Scottish guy named Dave MacLeod who is really good at all aspects of climbing. He's bouldered like a V14 and he's climbed 14+ and he has climbed alpine routes and he's done everything at a really really high level and he's really thoughtful and smart in his approach to climbing. So I really appreciate that and look to him for inspiration for the kind of climbing I want to do because he's good at everything and that's kind of what I enjoy too, is trying to be good at everything.

Interviewer: I think I just want to end on one more topic and that's being an all-around climber. As I was explaining before, it seems to me that the title of an "all-arounder" is kind of widening. Traditionally it meant ice climbing, mixed climbing, rock climbing, doing all those disciplines well and now someone like you Josh who participates in and wins the Ouray Ice Festival in front of a big crowd and then also plans expeditions to these really isolated places in the world, it seems like it involves a lot more.

Josh Wharton: I think it comes back to, to just like my climbing background and how I grew up in that traditional point of view and like being into all sorts of different stuff. Now like younger kids coming up, most people learn to climb in the gym and if you're good you probably gravitate towards sport climbing and bouldering because that's naturally, like if you're a talented climber then that's what you do. To get good at alpine you need to have a lot of experience, you have to do a lot of easy routes first to build up that experience. Same thing is true of traditional climbing. So I feel that I was kind of in a lucky niche, I came around at a lucky time where I was able to kind of explore all the different aspects of climbing and maybe not be great at any of them but be pretty good at all of them. So yeah, I don't know, I've just been lucky that way I guess and just enjoy all of it. Which maybe some people enjoy one aspect more than the other, so they gravitate towards that.

Interviewer: I think that's pretty rare because you have to train so hard in all of those to really improve.

Josh Wharton: Well, physically some of them aren't as hard as the other ones. So like alpine climbing has a lot more mental aspects to it than something like bouldering which is basically like pure physicality. I found the more experience I get the more I can get away with just physically being good and that I can kind of cheat the other stuff. You know what I mean, so I don't need to go practice the scary types of climbing as much because if I'm physically strong I know that I'm mentally capable of doing it. I have enough confidence, self-confidence and experience that I think I can pull those things off. It's more about being physically fit for me at this point.

Interviewer: Are there any last stories you want to share?

Josh Wharton: I don't think so, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Well thank you for your time.

Josh Wharton: Yeah, thanks.

08:39 [End of Part C. End of Interview.]

Note – Added material appears in brackets.

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ABSTRACT: An interesting interview with accomplished climber Josh Wharton who is a third generation climbers in his family and follows his mentor/father as the second generation to climb in the Estes Park area. Josh describes himself as an "all around climber" which involves an expertise in many different genres of climbing. Mr. Wharton points out the unique nature of Estes Park area climbing in as much as it offers such a great diversity of types of climbing opportunities. He has extensive climbing experience both locally and internationally and has the honor of being a Patagonia [gear company] Ambassador. Josh summarizes the essence of the sentiments of many of the famed climbers included in the Estes Valley Oral History Mountaineering Project as he explores the creative facets and rewards of cutting edge climbing.

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